

INTRODUCTION

Arid regions make up about one-third of the earth's land surface, a higher percentage than that of any other type of climate. As we have seen in the recent past, some of these regions—because of diverse and conflicting cultures, strategic importance, and natural resources—have become centers of conflict.

Military leaders have long recognized the potential for US involvement in conflict in these regions. Exercises at the Army's National Training Center, Fort Irwin and the Marine Corps' Marine Air Ground Combat Center, Twentynine Palms, California, have provided an opportunity for virtually all our ground forces to experience desert conditions. The success of Operation Desert Storm can be directly attributed to this realistic training.

Desert operations demand adaptation to the environment and to the limitations imposed by terrain and climate. Success depends on an appreciation of the effects of arid conditions on soldiers (both physically and psychologically), on equipment and facilities, and on combat and support operations. Leaders and soldiers must continually evaluate the situation and be ready to react to changing conditions. Equipment and tactics must be modified and adapted to a dusty, rugged landscape where temperatures vary from extreme highs to freezing lows and where visibility can change from 30 miles to 30 feet in a matter of minutes.

The key to success in desert operations is mobility. This was clearly evident in the ground operations of Desert Storm. The tactics employed to achieve victory over Iraq were wide, rapid flanking movements similar to those executed by Montgomery and Rommel during World War II. During Desert Storm, however, new technologies increased higher-echelon headquarters' ability to target, attack, and fight deep operations simultaneously. Modern weapon systems like the M1A1 Abrams tank, Bradley fighting vehicle, light armored vehicle, and assault amphibious vehicle, coupled with newly developed navigation and targeting devices, contributed immeasurably. Tactical units were able to fight battles with minimal direction; leaders were able to exercise initiative based on a clear understanding of their commanders' intent. Current doctrine—focused on improving mobility and implemented through the planning, preparation, and execution processes, battle drills, and tactical SOPs, paved the way for the overwhelming triumph.

Arid regions create both opportunities and restraints for soldiers and marines at all levels. The US military's performance in Desert Storm shows it understands these factors and has successfully addressed the effects of desert warfare on troops, equipment, and operations. As they prepare for the future, leaders, soldiers, and marines must study past campaigns and use the lessons they learn to reduce casualties, use the environment to their advantage, and ensure victory on the desert battlefield.